

Lessons from Apple under Steve Jobs

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When Steve Jobs took over in 1997, Apple — the company he co-founded in 1976 but from which he was fired nine years later — was just 90 days from bankruptcy. When he stepped down as CEO in August 2011, weeks before his death, Apple had just become the most valuable company (by market valuation) in the world. It remains so today. Apple, Inc., makes perhaps the most popular consumer products in the world, with instantly recognizable names such as the Mac, the iPhone and the iPad. Most observers agree that Apple changed the world. It did so through a passion to make the best products possible (but with just a few, focused product lines), a unique management style, and the goal of marrying technology and the liberal arts. From Apple's example of success, there are lessons for Unificationists.



Steve Jobs was a very difficult person to work under. He was prone to calling people either geniuses or bozos; he could be wickedly cruel to those who received his ire. He often invoked his “reality distortion field” to convince others to believe the opposite of what was otherwise obvious. But he had a passion for excellence and would settle for nothing less. That's why in the end people wanted to work under him. They knew he would make breakthroughs that no one else of his generation could.

Since his passing, many call him a combination of Thomas Edison and Henry Ford. And Apple's greatest achievements occurred with Job's “second coming,” the years after he returned to the company's helm, in which Apple was the most productive and innovative. Jobs was not only a great visionary, but he had tremendous willpower to accomplish what he wanted no matter what the odds.

Jobs had been ill with pancreatic cancer since 2003. Though the tumor was removed, cancer recurred by 2008, necessitating a liver transplant the next year. He knew he could not lead Apple forever, that his time was very limited. In fact in his last years, Jobs led Apple under considerable pain and physical weakness. He sought to institutionalize Apple's culture so that it would carry on with great energy and continuing success after his passing. He established an internal Apple University to teach employees the fundamentals of Apple's corporate DNA and creative culture. The last thing Jobs wanted after his passing was for managers to ask, “What would Steve do?” He felt that tendency was what hurt the Walt Disney Company after the death of its founder.

Whether Apple's culture under Steve Jobs has been successfully passed on to his successor and present employees remains to be seen. One thing is clear: the world has changed now that Apple is no longer the upstart. Its competition, such as Google and Samsung, is gaining ground in making attractive and highly-regarded products. But clearly Apple's future success hinges on being true to its DNA as well as adapting to the changing marketplace and consumer preferences.

As Fortune magazine senior editor, Adam Lashinsky, wrote, in his last years, "Jobs was intent on institutionalizing his ways of doing business. His mission: to turn the traits that people most closely associate with Jobs — the attention to detail, the secrecy, the constant feedback — into processes that can ensure Apple's excellence far into the future." Lashinsky dubbed Apple the "world's greatest startup;" it behaves more like a cutting-edge Silicon Valley startup than the consumer electronics giant it is. The corporate mentality is that of being the little guy, which promotes a level of innovation that otherwise would be impossible

There is a tale Steve Jobs would always recite, according to Lashinsky. It's called "The Difference Between the Janitor and the Vice President." He told it every time a manager was promoted to vice president in the company (Apple has about 70 vice presidents). Jobs would say that one time he asked his janitor why his trash wasn't regularly being emptied from his office, and he got an excuse: the janitor said the locks were changed and he doesn't have the new key. Jobs would say this is an acceptable excuse coming from someone who empties trash bins for a living. The janitor gets to explain why something went wrong. But senior managers cannot. When you're the janitor, Jobs would tell new VPs, reasons matter. Somewhere between the janitor and the CEO reasons stop mattering. That Rubicon is crossed when you become a vice president.

Apple instills a strong culture of responsibility through a series of weekly meetings that sets the tone for the entire company. Every Monday, they review their whole business, and from week to week the agenda is 80% the same. Simplicity breeds clarity, and from the top down everybody can stay on the same page. Moreover, the mindset of accountability extends from top to bottom among employees. There is no confusion as to who is responsible for what. In Apple's jargon, there is the term DRI, or "Directly Responsible Individual." Oftentimes, the DRI's name appears on an agenda for meetings so everybody knows who is responsible.

The culture of responsibility at Apple is applied even at the senior-most level. Last fall, when Apple introduced its own Maps app for the iPhone and iPad, it uncharacteristically had many errors compared to competitors' map apps. The senior vice president for iPhone software, who some thought might be an eventual successor to Jobs, refused to sign his name to a public apology issued by Apple's senior leadership, claiming the app's problems were exaggerated. That executive was immediately removed from his post, eased out of Apple by year's end, and the company restructured its senior management in a way that led to even greater collaboration and innovation (e.g., the forthcoming iOS 7 software).



Apple's newest iPhone and iPad software, iOS 7, was unveiled on June 10 at a San Francisco conference. With an interface conceived by Apple design chief, Sir Jony Ive, it received a standing ovation from the audience.

Steve Jobs always thought of Apple as more than another consumer electronics company. Although when young he admired Sony, he aspired for greater heights. He wanted to integrate the cutting-edge of technology with the humanities, and enrich people's lives. In his last two years as CEO, at the close of

new product announcements, on stage Jobs would show a slide of a street sign depicting the intersection of technology and the liberal arts. To his biographer, Walter Isaacson, Jobs observed:

The reason Apple resonates with people is that there is a deep current of humanity in our innovation. I think great artists and great engineers are similar, and that they both have a desire to express themselves.

Apple has not been perceived as an ordinary consumer electronics company. Buying one of its products made you feel you were part of something special, even magical. People could perceive the heart and effort, the quality, put into the product. For a long time, nothing could compare to Apple's products.

What lessons can Unificationists draw from the experience of Apple under Steve Jobs? Here are a few:

1. **True meaning of succession.** The last thing Steve Jobs wanted after his passing was for employees to ask what would he do. There is an Apple way to do things. Based on over five decades of marriage to her late husband, and her deep understanding of his teachings and standard – the basic DNA of our movement — True Mother is charting her own course. Perhaps, so should we.
2. **Comebacks.** Jobs was fired nine years after founding Apple but eventually came back far stronger and wiser – and fully vindicated. True Father was written off numerous times during his public ministry but each time came back. Some have written off the Unification movement but it can come back, and stronger than ever.
3. **Start-up spirit.** Apple preserves its consciousness of being the little guy, a cutting-edge start-up. True Mother also is calling the movement to its original consciousness, its early spirit of passionate evangelism as the guiding principle.
4. **“Directly Responsible Person.”** Clear designation of “no excuses” responsibility at the executive level is an important aspect of institutionalization. Many may feel that leadership within the Unification movement has at times been inefficient, with frequently changing priorities and emphases. Apple today maintains a clear-headed goal of making the best products, period. It is not leader-centered but principle-centered.
5. **Technology and the humanities.** For the Unification movement to spread its influence globally, especially to a younger generation, it needs to develop a richer, more mature culture, able to articulate realistic solutions to world problems.

With the sudden passing of our Founder, the challenge to Unificationists is to offer the world something much more than usually can be found. Our product needs to be cutting-edge, appeal to the widest spectrum of people, be infused with passion and creativity, and avoid rehashing what already exists (especially when many regard the old as inadequate for the times). It's easy to imitate but much harder to competently convey something profoundly original and compelling.

If we seize the right vision and spirit of leadership and management, and use the right tools, perhaps we can reach, in a comparable way, the global heights Apple finally could at the end of Steve Jobs' career – and even further.

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UPDATE: Apple's new TV and print campaign seems to say it all about the company philosophy